Note from the editor: [bricklaying is more than Flemish bond]

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The subjects of the 2009 issues of our quarterly were all more or less related to the financial crisis, its origins and effects and the existing gap between the real economy and the world of the “haute finance”. In the number 4 issue of 2009 we saw the dramatic consequences in one specific country, the Celtic tiger. As a follow-up of our debates on the crisis we started to assess the potential contribution that joint initiatives of the industry, based on social dialogue and often implemented through industry-wide institutions and provisions, can deliver to an anti-cyclical strategy. In CLR-News 3-2008 we reviewed several “working poor” studies. In these studies with regard to the appearance of the “working poor”, first in the US, later also in the EU, the bankruptcy of the strategy of welfare dismantling and deregulation was demonstrated. The ability to quickly find a job on the labour market is not enough and the focus on adaptability to the needs of the labour market in order to increase employment rates without taking into account the quality of the job and quality of life in general leads to atypical work forms. In today’s financial crisis, those countries that survive best have stronger regulatory frames, of labour law and collective agreements, in which workers are protected and treated as stakeholders that keep companies in good shape. And, if this goes hand in hand with a tradition of craftsmanship and high qualification, the labour market perspective is much more positive than in the deregulated and flexible markets. These regulatory frames are perhaps costly, but they serve as guarantee and as an anti-cyclical instrument in times of crisis.

There is no better plea nor argument for an industry-wide investment in vocational training. And that is what this issue is about. The construction industry has been faced with an enormous challenge since the opening up of the European market. Though mobility over national borders is low in the European labour market, if it happens, it
takes place either at management level in all industries or on building sites everywhere in Europe. Labour mobility in the construction industry is therefore high compared to many other sectors and many construction workers find employment in countries other than those in which they were originally educated and trained and acquired a qualification to work in a particular occupation. Construction operates in an environment where discontinuity, the loss of skilled labour and craftsmanship and the general image of the industry are central worries to be dealt with strategically as well as in day-to-day business at national and European levels. Actually this phenomenon becomes manifest in all Member States, whether new or old. After the wave of migration to the old Member States, the construction labour market in the CEE countries had to face serious problems with skills shortages and a too low influx of young workers. An ageing workforce in East and West will only intensify these problems.

With the increasingly skilled nature of the construction labour process, qualifications provide a more and more important means of recognizing a person’s level of competence, skill and knowledge. And, with rapid changes in the nature and number of firms in the industry across Europe, it is more and more difficult to rely only on a person’s experience and personal references as proof of their abilities.

This was the background for a research project funded by the European Commission in the frame of the Leonardo-da-Vinci programme. The study ‘Bricklaying Qualifications, Work and Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Europe’ seeks to compare the nature, content and regulation of different qualifications and VET for bricklaying in eight European Union (EU) countries: Belgium, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, England, Poland and France. In this issue of CLR-News the
project team reports about the interim findings. First we have a synthesis written by Michaela Brockmann, Linda Clarke and Christopher Winch. A longer version of the synthesis is available on our website http://www.clr-news.org/CLR-Studies/Synthesis%20report%20bricklayers%20final.pdf Secondly our Polish colleague Jakub Kus writes about new skills and new qualifications and the last subject article on the “current EU policy” comes from EFBWW secretary Rolf Gehring. CLR-News 3-2009 brought a critical review by Regan Scott (Contributions to the great TU debate, page 35-52). In this issue you find a reply to this by Richard Croucher and other authors of the reviewed books. Next you will find the usual reports, reviews and announcements.

As ever, contributions and feedback are welcome.